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SUBJECT: MALI'S UNFUNDDED ROAD TO THE FUTURE

REF: A. BAMAKO 1032

¶B. BAMAKO 0590

¶11. SUMMARY: Mali's road system, particularly to the north and east, is inadequate to promote either security or economic development. The Malian government has addressed this concern with a comprehensive fifteen year building plan, but is able to fund little more than maintenance on the current network. Mali currently depends on donor funding for nearly all new construction. Prior to the civil war in Cote D'Ivoire, Abidjan was the port of entry or departure for over 80 percent of Mali's exports and imports. The war disrupted the link between Mali and Abidjan, and as a result the GOM has asked donors to support construction projects focused on improved access to ports in Dakar and Nouakchott, and even as far afield as Lome and Tema (in Ghana). Roads to the north and east of Bamako needed to spur economic and political integration and facilitate regional security (reftel A) are included in the national plan, but important segments would not be initiated until 2008 and as late as 2012--and only if more donor funding is forthcoming. Until the roads are built, the underdevelopment and insecurity that plagues northern Mali will likely continue unabated into the foreseeable future. End Summary.

Priority of Priorities

¶12. Mahamadou Diallo, Technical Advisor to the Minister of Transport and a civil engineer by profession, said that roads are the "priority of priorities" in Mali, and provided details of current programs and future ambitions in a discussion September 25. Diallo contributed to an ambitious plan that, if implemented fully, would link Bamako with most major towns by paved roads by 2020, with an overall price tag of 1.6 Trillion FCFA (about 3.13 billion USD). Diallo says nearly every government official understands the need to expand and/or improve the current transportation network, and road funding is intensely debated at the National Assembly, but funding for nearly all aspects of the plan will have to come from donor countries. Diallo says the Transport Ministry's allocation of the Malian state budget, 13 billion FCFA (2.3 million US dollars), is only enough to maintain the road network already in place.

¶13. Diallo said the war in Cote D'Ivoire was shock to the Malian transport system; before the war he estimated that over 80 percent of Malian exports and imports passed through Abidjan. Mali now depends heavily on the port at Dakar, which Diallo believes is overcrowded and inefficient. Consequently, the GOM has ongoing projects with donors to improve or build roads and infrastructure facilitating access to a variety of ports. The targeted ports not only include Dakar and Nouakchott but also ports as far afield as Lome and Tema (Note: access to the last two ports depends on the quality of roads through Burkina Faso as well as Mali. End Note). These road projects, not coincidentally, are also concentrated to give better export channels for cotton,

Mali's principal cash crop. Diallo says that Mali currently has nearly 195 billion FCFA (382 million USD) in ongoing donor-fund infrastructure projects, mostly supported by the EU, World Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank.

¶4. Important northern segments in the national plan, essential for security as well as economic development according to many Malian observers (reftel A), include the following:

--Bamako-Timbuktu: 635 kilometers, 100 billion FCFA (196 million U.S. dollars), with segments initiated in 2008 and completion unlikely until 2012.

--Mopti-Gao: 568 kilometers, with a projected cost of 48 billion FCFA (94 million USD) and a construction date of ¶2008. The paved road was poorly maintained and needs significant rehabilitation. The road linking Mopti to Bamako is in a good state of repair.

--Gao-Bourem: 95 kilometers, 15 billion FCFA (29 million USD), 2008.

--Bourem-Kidal: 260 kilometers, 41 billion FCFA (80 million USD), 2012.

--Kidal-Algerian border: 300 Km, 24 billion FCFA (47 million USD), 2012. This segment would be an improved all weather unpaved road, thus the relatively low price for the distance covered.

¶5. COMMENT: The roads linking Bamako with Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal are critical for security as well as economic reasons (reftel A), and until constructed, the economic,

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political, and cultural trends pulling northern and southern Mali apart are likely to continue.

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